WORK ORGANISATION AND STRESS

WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION

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SYSTEMATIC PROBLEM APPROACHES FOR EMPLOYERS,
MANAGERS AND TRADE UNION REPRESENTATIVES

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Preface

This document is the third in a series of occupational health documents entitled: *Protecting Workers' Health*. The World Health Organization (WHO) within the Programme of Occupational Health publishes it. It is the result of the implementation effort of the Global Strategy on Occupational Health for All as agreed upon at the Fourth Network Meeting of the WHO Collaborating Centres in Occupational Health which was held in Espoo, Finland from 7-9 June 1999.

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Work stress is thought to affect individuals' psychological and physical health, as well as organisations' effectiveness, in an adverse manner. This booklet provides practical advice on how to deal with work stress. It is intended that employers, managers and trade union representatives use this booklet as part of an initiative to educate on the management of work stress. Discussed are the nature of stress at work, the causes and effects of stress, as well as prevention strategies and risk assessment and management methods. Also discussed are the role of the organisational culture in this process and the resources to be drawn upon for managing work stress.

The advice should be interpreted in the light of the particular problems faced by different groups of workers and what is reasonably practicable by way of solutions for each individual employer. Lists of common causes and effects of stress are included for illustrative purposes. References and suggestions for further reading are listed in Chapter 12.

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Introduction

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Work stress is recognised world-wide as a major challenge to workers' health and the healthiness of their organisations (see for example, ILO 1986; 1992).

Workers who are stressed are also more likely to be unhealthy, poorly motivated, less productive and less safe at work. Their organisations are less likely to be successful in a competitive market.

Stress can be brought about by pressures at home and at work. Employers cannot usually protect workers from stress arising outside of work, but they can protect them from stress that arises through work.

Stress at work can be a real problem to the organisation as well as for its workers. Good management and good work organisation are the best forms of stress prevention. If employees are already stressed, their managers should be aware of it and know how to help.

This booklet is concerned largely with the every day stress

of work and not specifically with the stress caused by sudden, traumatic events nor with the management of post-traumatic stress disorder. The booklet will tell you about:

- what work stress is (and is not)

- the risk management approach to work stress

- how to assess work for stress-related risks to health

- how to prevent or reduce work stress

- how to provide support for those people who are suffering from stress

- organisational policies and culture required to promote these actions

The goals of *best practice* objectives with regard to stress management are to prevent stress happening or, where employees are already experiencing stress, to prevent it from causing serious damage to their health or to the healthiness of their organisation.

In many countries, legislation obliges employers to take care of the health